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FRONT COVER: *The Alhambra, Granada, Spain*

BACK COVER: *The Inner Quad, Stanford*

*Fred Terman said, "Where in the world did you find that picture
of the Stanford Quad in Spain?"*

For more, see Harry Sanders's article on p. 5.

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Antonio Magliabechi: Bibliomaniac Extraordinaire

by WILLIAM P. WREDEN

Bibliomania is a species of insanity both rational and interesting. It is an affliction which is totally pleasant. Austin Dobson has expressed this as:

“Books, books again, and books once more!
These are our theme, which some miscall
Mere madness, setting little store
On copies either short or tall.”*

MY EXAMPLE of bibliomania is Antonio Magliabechi. He lived in Florence where he was born October 28, 1633. At the age of sixteen he was apprenticed as a goldsmith to a firm of jewelers. He pursued this occupation until he was forty. All during this period he studied literature, however. This was the beginning of his craving for books. He read until late at night and also during off moments at work. He became an ornament of Florence. Heyman, a celebrated Dutch professor, visited him among his books and found they were piled in heaps on the floor so that it was difficult to sit or walk. There was a narrow space in each room so that you could walk sideways to get from one room to another. All the rooms in Magliabechi's house were crammed with books. This did not bother him, though. He knew the exact location of every book and could immediately find the desired book he wanted for reference. There were six rooms on the two floors of his house and all were full of books. On the second floor there were two good beds in one of the rooms. The beds were both piled high with books.

His personal habits were interesting. He never undressed for bed because it was unnecessary and too luxurious. Every night he would read until he fell asleep in his chair. He would eat with a book on each side of his plate. His table was a pile of books. He slept on his books with a cloth wrapper over him. He very seldom went anywhere. During his entire life he only went to see Fiesoli and once ten miles farther by order of his master the Grand Duke of Tuscany. His usual food consisted of a few eggs, a little bread, and some water.

His way of dressing was as odd as his meals. He usually wore a knee-length doublet; large breeches; a hat worn and ragged; a coarse neckcloth, littered with snuff; a dirty shirt which he would wear until it became shreds; and to complete his costume, a pair of ruffles which did not belong to the shirt. In cold weather he had a stove fastened to his arms. This would singe and occasionally burn his clothes and hands.

* *Poetical Works*, p. 391.

Magliabechi has been described as "an eccentric old bachelor, negligent, dirty, slovenly, always reeking with tobacco who engaged in study at all hours."

Despite all of these undesirable characteristics and habits, he was revered by the great men and women of Florence. They looked upon him as a prodigy. Because of his great eminence and almost inconceivable knowledge of books, the great duke, Cosimo the Third, did him the honor of making him his librarian. This meant that in addition to his own library, Magliabechi would have the use of the Duke's collection.

Magliabechi died at the Monastery of Sta. Maria Novella in his eighty-first year, on July 14, 1714. He left his collection of 30,000 volumes to the Grand Duke to be used as a public library. The balance of his estate was left to the poor. In 1861 the Magliabechiana was united with the grand-ducal private library by King Victor Emanuel, which then became the Biblioteca Nazionale of Florence.

To sum up, I believe that Magliabechi was the greatest bookworm who ever lived. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a bookworm as one who is ever poring over books. Magliabechi never forgot what he once read and he read continuously during all of his waking hours. His recall was instantaneous. He was chronically ill all his life, with the disease of bibliomania. What a blessing that no practitioner of maladies was able to cure him.

The French collector Boulard accumulated some 600,000 volumes and Heber collected between 200,000 and 300,000 volumes. They mostly amassed books, whereas Magliabechi read his 30,000 volumes and could recall almost all information in his library.

William P. Wreden is a member of the Associates and proprietor of William P. Wreden Books & Manuscripts in Palo Alto. This article is a slightly edited version of one that appeared last year in a keepsake for a meeting of the Roxburghe and Zamorano Clubs of San Francisco.

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